

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: City of Dubuque
Program Name: Partners in Learning AmeriCorps Program

Application ID: 14AC156628

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

The information provided by the applicant illustrates a need for a supplementary reading program for urban, at-risk children nine and under.

There is a high amount, 15.6%, of students that represent youngsters in need from identified diversity groups, with the poorest showing in reading proficiency, just under 49% for African-Americans. The applicant showed the importance of students' reading skills to graduate and pursue further education after high school.

The applicant clearly stated the level of reading proficiency at 72%, indicating the lack of reading comprehension among 3rd through 5th grade level.

The applicant provides data that indicates that only 49% of African American children in the City of Dubuque are proficient in reading in grades 3, 4, and 5, 40% in grades 6, 7, and 8 and 25% in grade 11.

The applicant showed the importance of students' reading skills to graduate and pursue further education after high school

Strong and compelling evidence exists illustrating that assistance provided by AmeriCorps Members will be effective, especially as the proposed program in reading leads to the attainment of intended outcomes and results.

Intensive in-school weekly sessions by AmeriCorps members are tied to reading assessment to help ensure student success.

There are challenging community-success-oriented programs promoting nature and conversation projects whereby students will earn science or English credits.

The applicant presents a reasonable Theory of Change that is likely to produce a logical relationship between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.

Prior experiences in the Partners in Learning project clearly demonstrate that program outcomes have been largely met, especially in its reading and math tutoring goals.

Past overall figures illustrate that program targets were reached and outcomes realized. Of the base of 900 students, 500 completed the tutorial program and 300 showed improvements.

As stated in the narrative, the applicant reports that the performance measures for the Partners in Learning Program were met in all areas except one (only 225 students showed improvement instead of the targeted 300 students).

Weaknesses:

There is neither relevant data on the identified Hispanic/Latino youth to be helped nor comparison information on at-risk children and those not at risk.

Data provided on poverty levels is inconsistent and in some cases lower than urban, state, and national rates which does not prove the urgency of the need.

There are no statistics on academic gaps or post-term learning loss data provided to substantiate support of the supplementary summer reading component, a major focus of the proposed program.

The applicant specified the target population as (K-3). However, there is no data to substantiate the problem.

Only African American youth statistics were presented. Other ethnic groups' information was not presented to understand the magnitude of the problem holistically.

The applicant did not connect the low level of reading skills of the population to be served with future academic activities.

The applicant does not give data to substantiate some of its claims regarding the community. For example, the applicant states that school officials have confirmed that summer learning loss is apparent in Dubuque, but has not collected data on a large scale to substantiate this.

The applicant provides data that indicates that the City of Dubuque's poverty level is actually less than the statewide and national poverty rates. Also, for children under the age of 5, the poverty level of the City of Dubuque is less than the national level and only 1% higher than the statewide level.

The applicant discussed benefits of Response to Intervention (RtI), decoding, and comprehension as concepts. However, they were not discussed in the context of the model. There is a lack of clarity and alignment between the RtI information and the model to be implemented.

It was mentioned in the narrative and logic model section about the youth (age 13-17) program during the summer.

Nonetheless, it seems that the applicant was suggesting two different programs: (1) K-3 children and (2) youth (age 13-17). It was not clear if the literature review applied to all age groups.

The applicant presents limited information about some of the activities that will be conducted by AmeriCorps members. For example, the applicant states that programming will take place 2-3 times per week to support at-risk youth and teens. No information regarding the types of activities or specific intended outcomes is provided.

Even though the applicant has transitioned from data collected using surveys, opinions, and observations to reliable and valid instruments to measure performance, the applicant cannot analyze the data for trends yet. Therefore, the gathered information might not show the whole picture of increase/decrease in performance measures.